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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 002494

SIPDIS

EUR/CACEN FOR E. SIDEREAS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: RECENT STATEMENTS SUGGEST COOLER LOCAL TEMPERATURE  
ON PENDING IRAQ DEPLOYMENT

REF: YEREVAN 21666

Classified By: Ambassador John M. Evans for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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SUMMARY  
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11. (C) Recent statements by high-level policymakers and opinion pieces in the local media suggest that there may be growing opposition to the pending deployment of Armenian peacekeeping support to Iraq. Reports of a car bomb explosion November 9 near an Armenian church in Iraq re-ignited a flurry of discussion in Armenia's capital and within the Armenian Diaspora community as to the potential dangers to Armenian communities in Iraq and the greater Middle East should Armenians join coalition forces in Iraq. In contrast to earlier criticism from smaller NGOs or marginalized political leaders in the opposition (reftel), recent remarks have come from the offices of the Prime Minister and the leadership of the governing coalition's Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF-"Dashnaksutyun") Party. A member of the National Assembly (NA) told us recently that the GOAM has not consulted as deeply within the legislature as it should and that some within the NA are starting to waver on the issue. Despite continued reassurances from the President, Foreign Minister and Defense Minister that the GOAM will stay its course (and the existence of enough ruling coalition votes in the legislature to pass such a measure notwithstanding), the road to a favorable vote in the National Assembly is likely to be less smooth than it was when Armenia first committed to deploy. End Summary.

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PM, DASHNAKS LESS UPBEAT ABOUT IRAQ DEPLOYMENT  
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12. (C) Recent statements by high-level policymakers and accompanying opinion pieces in the local media suggest that there may be growing opposition to the pending deployment of Armenian non-combat support troops to Iraq. In contrast to earlier criticism from smaller NGOs and marginalized political leaders in the opposition (ref), recent remarks have come from serious political players in Armenia's capital. Prime Minister Andranik Margaryan's late October comments to local media that "we may or may not go ahead with the deployment" was the first time that a high-ranking GOAM official had expressed doubt about the viability of sending Armenian support to coalition forces in Iraq. A press conference following recent party meetings of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF-"Dashnaksutyun") included calls for caution, suggesting that an Armenian deployment could turn Armenian communities in the Middle East into targets for terrorist vendettas. The local media latched onto both these statements while reiterating earlier comments by opposition leader Artashes Geghamian and local NGOs that criticized the GOAM's decision to deploy.

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CAR BOMB IN IRAQ RE-IGNITES DEBATE  
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13. (C) The November 9 explosion of a car bomb outside an Armenian Church in Iraq re-ignited local debate about the potential pros and cons of an Iraq deployment. Both local and Diaspora-based media outlets were quick to point to the bombing as a possible warning to the GOAM by terrorist groups not to join coalition forces. Local media published excerpts from open letters by Archbishop Avak Asadourian, representative of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Iraq, to President Robert Kocharian and Armenia's parliamentary leadership criticizing the decision to deploy Armenian troops, linking it to safety concerns for the estimated 20,000 Armenians living in Iraq. A local spokesman for the Armenian Apostolic Church, normally moderate in his approach to the subject, told us that there were growing concerns following that bombing that a deployment of Armenian forces could lead to similar attacks in the near future.

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DIASPORA PUSHES ON PARLIAMENT TO THINK TWICE  
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14. (C) Recent meetings of international Diaspora groups have produced unofficial "resolutions" that the Diaspora should raise its concerns with contacts in the National Assembly. A worldwide meeting of Armenian women in Geneva in late October, for example, resulted in telephone calls to MPs concerning the safety of Armenian communities in places like Syria, Lebanon and Egypt should the National Assembly ratify the decision to deploy forces. A recent worldwide meeting of one Diaspora group reportedly included one-on-one "consultations" with GOAM leaders to "see if they were really going to go through" with the pledged deployment. One MP told us recently that the GOAM has not consulted as deeply within the legislature as it should and that these statements are making some within the NA waver on the issue.

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GOAM STILL STANDS FIRM, REASSURES US  
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15. (C) The President, Foreign Minister, and Defense Minister continue to reassure USG officials that enough political capital exists in the National Assembly to push through ratification of the deployment. NA Speaker Baghdasaryan publicly responded to concerns in late October saying that the humanitarian nature of the planned deployment and continued USG assistance would help the vote pass without problem. While the governing coalition technically has enough votes to ratify deployment (even given the ongoing opposition boycott), the recent statements by the Prime Minister and Dashnak leadership reveal potential fissures that could make the upcoming vote a more delicate initiative than it first appeared.

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COMMENT  
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16. (C) We will continue to engage MPs and GOAM leadership privately on the importance of support for coalition forces but do not now plan on aggressive programs of Public Diplomacy to support deployment. When DAS Kennedy met President Kocharian in October, he asked that we curb such efforts as they would "likely be counterproductive." End comment.  
EVANS